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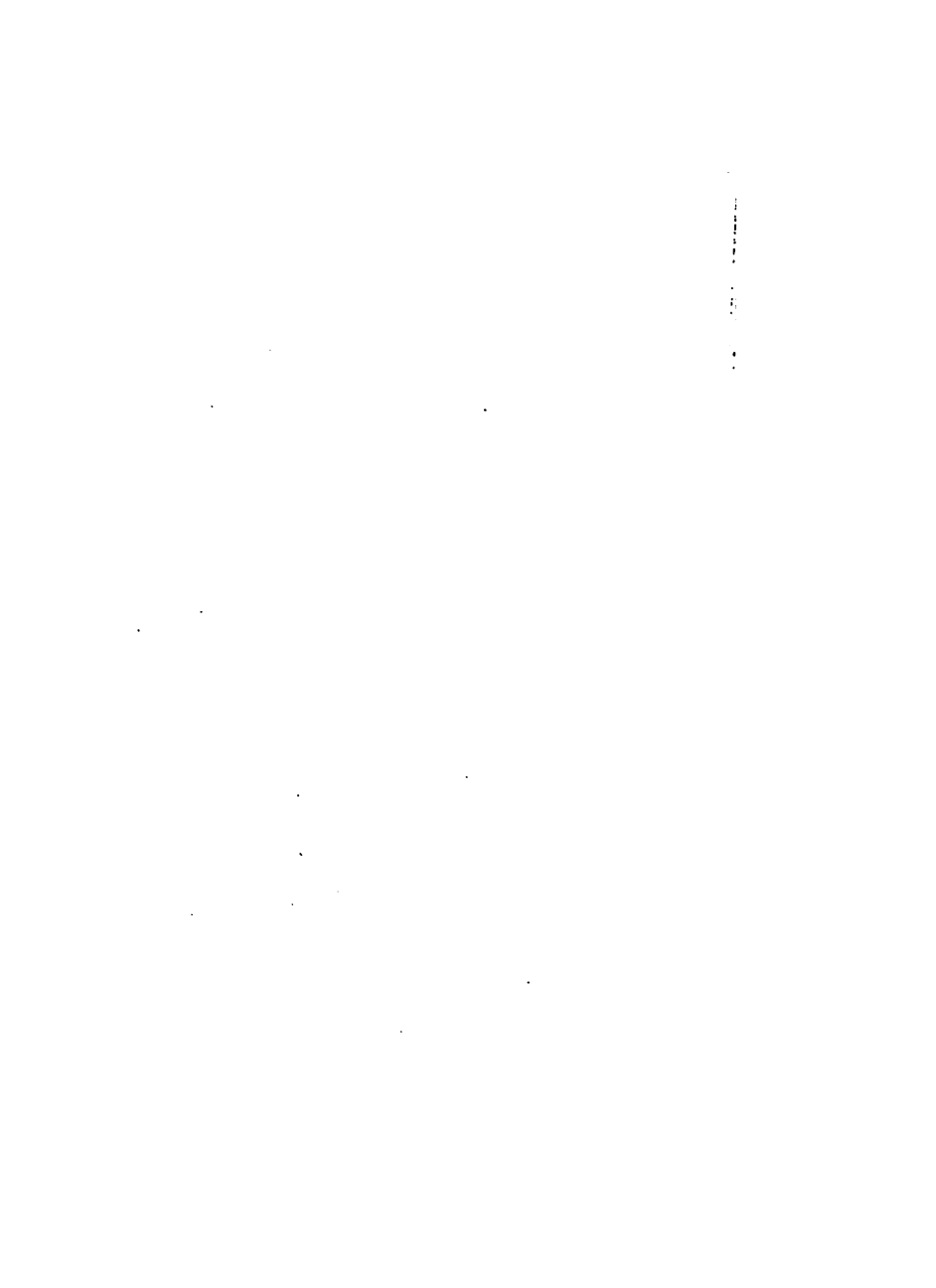


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Echoes of Destiny

CLARENCE STONE

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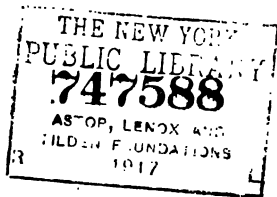
Echoes of Destiny

CLARENCE STONE

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Echoes of Destiny

NEITHER in Bagdad nor in King Arthur's Court have men seen anything more occupied with passions than the length of street you see from your window at night, where house faces silent house as guarded as a mask, where strangers pass unspeaking beneath the golden lamps and go on into the darkness beyond.

Empires of enchantment escape all geographers and call every man to be his own Columbus. No singer since the world began has flung toward the throne of Dest-

iny a keener mingling of heart ache and desire than the girl in the yard beside your yard, when she comes out alone to gather washed clothes and starts singing in the moonlight.

Rain at dawn and the sound of bells. A grayness like a spreading cobweb and no other dawn, the murmur of a marching rain upon the porch roof by the window and across the dimness, through the murmur of the rain, the sound of tolling bells from a church far off—the origin of happiness escapes discovery, grave echoes of triumph are in the racing rain.

An illusion, happiness? Surely, and of good value. Are not all

things built of illusion? A seeming reality, a sudden disappearance. You toss a lump of sugar into a cup of tea; it is gone, there is no sugar now, hence there was no sugar. You object that you can taste it even if you cannot see it. Have you not tasted happiness—afterward? A year ago you met a man in broad daylight, gripped his hand, saw life in his eyes, saw the sunlight on his hair, heard the sound of his voice. He is dead, there is no man such as your memory cherishes, he is gone—an illusion.

Look out of the window, look toward the street, when next there seems an end of enjoyment and delight; watch the weather-

hardened men swing past, teamsters, peddlers, gypsies of high health, well aware that the fresh air is indeed the breath of life.

You are not interested in the experiences of other people? You do not see that the emotions of other men can have any considerable meaning for you? Too different, too remote? Yes, they are very different. The intense and endless interest of life consists in this difference. Who has not twisted a crooked lip at the idea of equality? And what is this difference between men? Simply the difference of leaves growing on the same tree, large leaves, little leaves, vigorous leaves, shrivelled leaves, warped

leaves, graceful leaves, on the same tree— there is no equality, but even fools feel the truth and power of fraternity.

Is it not bracing to remember that men are in essence alike and that each man stands unchangeably alone? Each renders communal service while seeking his own advantage, each is linked to all the others yet each must search unaided on his own adventures of discovery. Why do men so soon grow weary in admiration of machines? Is it not because a machine is the father of sameness? Is the frequent indifference of man to man rooted in real divergence, or in weariness at an universal kinship that

sometimes seems too close? Human unity in strength is not the unity of sameness, it is a basic unity underlying infinite variations of surface. Men need each other, and especially do they need their differences from each other.

The man at your side in the street car, muttering abominations to his companion, is not fond of filth. He uses vileness as a shield, he finds it easy to hide behind satiric talk of bestialities. He is of the fading older people, born bewildered, drenched from the beginning in a vague unending pain. If once you heard him improvising at the piano, or listened while he talked of canoe trips

through wild creeks and marshes, there would come to you an afternoon of early spring in the tide-water country of his birth: soft sunlight, the wide river quiet, its color a dim blue, the nearby woods just coming into leaf, pale exquisite green against the black tree trunks, the air delicately warm, intimate, wistful. Or there might be a hopelessness upon you like a curse over all the world—the voice of his spirit quavers, is rich in chords of a broken beauty, like the crying of a loon in a gray October twilight, with a sad rain falling and the dark night coming on.

You shrug your shoulders, thinking that for you there is

only dullness, never any contact with piquant, peculiar or stimulating personalities. In the house where you are called Mother there is a parrot, a dog, and a tiger. Your daughter by marriage, the wife of your son, has she ever spoken a sentence or bought a hat which was not in imitation? If in the morning of Sunday you scoff at churches and the people of churches, she too will scoff, if in the evening of Sunday she sees a child at church weeping in terror before an imagined vision of eternal torture, she also will weep. And is it not plain that your son, with his steadfast good nature, his greed and lust, is quite comfortable and contented

in the dog's collar of custom which you other three, his mother, his father, his wife, have woven and fastened on his neck? Why are men quick to be friendly with the man who sleeps at your side each night? Because he now has a certain amount of money? Forty years ago, when he was an obscure boy in a small side street, other boys were quick to be friendly with him. Where else have you met that slow menacing eye, that long loose step, that soft voice with a growling undertone? In a cage of merciless beasts. This man came from the womb of his mother with murder in his heart, ordained to live and die dreaming of destruction: though few have

seen him raise so much as a finger against his fellows, an instinct bids all men beware of crossing his path—each night you sleep beside a tiger.

At the office where you direct the labors of a hundred people, do you think your morning's mail about dollars and cents, about prices, plans and proposals, is all the postman brings? The dull boy in the corner who never wilts beneath the dull routine, gets two letters a week from his younger brother who is not a dull boy, who can stir the strings of a violin to shake the heart of a devil: his lungs are gone, a while in the mountains and then no more of him. Your confidential steno-

grapher, her face as changeless as an idol, her hands tireless for typing, do you think that twelve dollars a week and a pride in twelve years' service are sufficient to fill her life? She still hopes to be the mate of a man who has grown gray without finding even the shadow of success, and it's a dreary day that brings her no message from him. The girl at the third desk in the long row, the quiet girl with queer eyes, do you think she is first at the office every morning just to open the mail early and make a good impression on the chief clerk? It is mail for which she comes early, but not your mail. She is the mistress of a traveling salesman who returns

to her each week-end for two nights and a day of bitter-sweet and scarlet hours: she understands that some week-end he will not return.

Are not all human beings similarly on an operating table every hour of their lives, waiting the will of the Experimental Surgeon? It is a sense of this seeming helplessness that makes humanity endure, in part because of an unconscious despair, in part because of an unwilling admiration, the tyranny of masters and conquerors, those ruthless spirits that face the days resistant, aggressive and unflinching as life itself. These men of cyclonic mind embody one of the two fundamental

methods—violence, and silence—which determine each detail of progress, human progress, progress of suns, stars, cosmic cycles. Creation, birth, is violence. Growth, renewal, is silence. Power is violence concentrated and trained. Influence is an emanation from reserves of silence. In every prophet broods a fluid dreamer, in every captain lurks a devil barely held in restraint. As violence of the mind is more creative, more destructive, than violence of the body only, so violence of the spirit is the greatest violence, which is the greatest power.

Violence and magic—the conception of a child, the birth of a child.

What could be more magical and violent than the power for destruction and achievement hidden in a box of matches? To take a tiny stick and at a stroke create a flare of flame—no legend ever related anything more remote from the believable.

The bottle before you on the writing table is filled with a magic liquor. Nothing is stranger than this, that you should be able to take up a little tool with a tip of steel, dip it in this bottle, then make marks upon a piece of paper that will reveal to other men, distant a thousand miles or a thousand years, the fresh color and contents of you as you are at

the moment when making those marks.

And never a message from man to man across the centuries has bridged a distance comparable to the chasm in time and evolution that is bridged when a man looks into the eyes of a dog and these two exchange assurances.

Eyes in the night. In the luminous edges of the night, along the path of the moon, there appear innumerable pairs of eyes, eyes of men and women known, and of unknown men and women, eyes of poets, prophets and thinkers, of murderers, prostitutes, thieves, of men of might and beaten men, of proud women and women who laugh and women who weep, and

there are eyes of children wondering, and fierce eyes of lions, and cruel eyes of cats, and gentle eyes of cattle, and birds with shallow eyes, and fish with cold eyes, and snakes with eyes as bright and hard as jewels. And each pair of eyes beholds all the other eyes with complete understanding, for in all the eyes there is this same message: "I, too, am torn by conflict and blinded by the glare of mocking lights, I, too, fight forward toward the truth as best I can, for in me, even as in you, there burns a spark of deathless fire, there beats a pulse of high desire."

There is a time for laughter and a cursing time and a time for

men with women, there is a fighting time and a time for seeking and there is a time for tears. Have you not seen all those times, as in a woven pattern, when to you there has come a time for silence? Silence is thronged and musical with the sound of superior voices. When the lips of men are still and the tongues of women are quiet, then there returns the fundamental chorus. Silence resounds with the singing of the foremost children of life, gladness which is golden, and white adoration. In silence there rise up the strong voices of a band of mighty beasts, more useful and wholesome than men will admit—the black persistence of hate, the red impati-

ence of lust, the merciless gray of ambition, howling with hungry throats across the smoothness of eternity. Also in silence are sensed rhythms of affection and aspiration, much like the voices of women and men but nobler. Silence tends the spirit as sun and rain tend grass. Silence is fresher air.

The snarling huckster with black brows, the smiling trickster with limp hands—have not these men wanted something greatly to become so indifferent to contempt? A sort of garbage. But what makes existence fertile if it be not insistent desires? All men are rogues, of course, and many women, but of rogues in the re-

stricted sense it is certain that in exchange for the rascalities inflicted by them upon individuals they give something of value to men in general. A rogue early understands that his attitudes are not the usual attitudes, and in rejecting the usual, in refusing to conform, in determining to decide for himself, a rogue finds need for hardihood, he achieves personality. Whatever his limitations and delinquencies, it is clear that he fights strongly for his standard of freedom; he resists that leveling tendency by which time unceasingly tests humanity. And in thus refusing to surrender, even though his withholding be perverse or unintelligent, a rogue

stimulates the imaginations of more scrupulous men, merely by force of example he keeps his fellows from too abject a submission to circumstance.

If in nothing else, a rogue deserves well of other men in this, that he illustrates eagerness, he retains his appetite. A man with a barrel balanced on his shoulder, striding surely up a hill—so it is having an appetite for the present hour. Yes, there are many hours when you have no appetite. Perhaps you are growing. Days come when stagnation seems to saturate all the world and the waters on it, even the sky beyond. These are pregnant days, days of renewal, these are hours of ac-

cumulation. Would there be any lift toward delight without the growth of desire through dullness and pain? How could men attain vision or comprehend achievement without a background of bewilderment? Idleness is only apparent, existence is always engaged, perhaps in the sorting of knowledge, perhaps in the storing of strength. Destiny is profoundly occupied when profoundly idle.

Were you ever so broadly aware of the rest of the world as in moments of idleness, as in marginal moments? Reeds along the tidal shore. A multitude of green and slender spires, standing erect upon the tawny sand, reaching

into the shifting tidal surge. And whether the wide water be dark gray, or splotched with green and purple underneath a sinister sky, or warmly blue to greet the golden sun, always the slender spires stand intent and tapering, motionless upon a quiet day, waving when a smooth wind stirs, tossing to the turmoil of a summer hurricane, yet even tossing not less clear and sure, a multitude of green and slender spires upreaching from the tawny tidal shore.

Do you doubt that there is deep meaning in shapes and forms? The forms of trees are symbols to stir the minds of men, in the contour of tree crowns, in the character of tree trunks, in the

outline of branches, are messages and parables waiting interpretation.

From the top of this windswept hill a gnarled forbidding apple tree flings its twisted stiff fantastic arms against the sky, gruff, durable, grotesquely wholesome.

A hundred yards away stands a great fullbodied cherry, product of the same soil, the same sun, the same snows, winds and rains, its massive trunk holding up huge limbs that carry a high crown of close-packed leaves—here is large dignity and friendliness.

At the edge of the field is an isolated cedar, an aristocrat self-contained, rising toward the sun with geometrical exactness, most

impressive when it stands beneath the threat of thunder clouds and sways in buoyant battle, graceful, almost aggressive, facing storm winds that roar through the neighboring woodland and leave all other trees tousled, trembling.

Under the bank on the tidal shore crouches another cedar, short, ancient, grim. Its roots have been half bared by the ebb and flow of tides, they form a writhing cluster of coiled serpents, tense jointed legs of beasts, clutching hands, and from this emphatic pedestal of struggle rises a brief burly trunk bearing branches surpassingly misshapen—battle unending, hatred embodied, battle with the vision of de-

feat, steadily the tides tear away the soil and starve the writhing roots.

Further along the shore is a tall young tulip poplar, straight but not arrow straight, rising with almost imperceptible undulations, its bronze-brown trunk streaked with white; the branches wave slightly as does the trunk, bounding up at eager angles, and the large open leaves are like scalloped squares—a lovable tree, graceful, gracious.

Also the faces and forms of women and men are authentic indications.

The white rose woman. She is lithe and tall, dressed in clinging black with an edging of white

at the wrists and throat, a white brow and much fair hair above it. Her body is glad of its own slender loveliness, and light from some forgotten world plays about her brow.

The woman with wise hands. Her fingers are long and firm, and for a woman her hand is large, and the fibre of her flesh, the texture of her skin, are such that the touch of her makes the air seem cleaner: meeting her hand in hand, it is good to breathe deep.

The woman with sly eyes. In her eyes there is provocation, and a faithless humor, and the smoothness of her voice is the purr of passion biding its time. Her eyes

of allurements measure every man as a possible lover, her full breasts lift boldly to invite the hand of desire, every undulation of her body, each accent that she utters, is simply a variation of an unmistakable message—a reminder for such as would spin their fabrics too fine.

The wild-flower woman. Her dark hair waves down about an oval face always lit by a little smile, her eyes are gray-green, rather sad, rather amused at something no one else can see, and when she walks her slim body sways with a flower stalk languor, as if gently urged by the breath of a slow soft wind.

The woman with straight legs.

The rise and fall of her feet is unfailingly sure. Whatever be the thought in her mind or the stress of her emotion, never in her day are the flowing hours dulled by indecision. The quick action of her knees, the rhythmic swing of her rounded legs, straight and strong from ankle to hip, proclaims the health of a spirit fearless and proud and free.

The woman looking forward. She sits on a low stool beside an open window, her head held high on a round full neck, her broad brow and broad jaw unchangeably firm. The lines of her body are lost in a dark drapery of loose clothing, only the resolute poised head stands clear from a physical

structure grown impersonal in its concentration on the coming of maternity. Her eyes look out upon the world with an imperious aloofness, her voice has the note of finality, she has undertaken every woman's supreme endeavor and is wholly determined to win.

The woman on the wing. Her mouth, satiric and smiling, says more than the words that come from it, her black eyes are inscrutable and mockingly alert, her black eyebrows swoop up like the wings of a wide arrow. The ivory of her face and throat is lustrous against the darkness of her hair; the child on her lap has the same lustrous skin, the same unrevealing eyes. Maternity has

scarcely touched her. She is unhampered, untamed, untamable—like a bird on the wing or an arrow taut upon the bow, ready to dip deep into all adventure.

Woman is the source; within her burns the deathless fire of life everlasting, beside which the vigor of man is but a brief, a transitory flame. Woman is the source, and even in her bitterest day of apparent disaster still to her remain hope and secret laughter, well she knows that soon again some man, her mate, her son, it may be a stranger who does no more than look once into her eyes in passing, shall kneel in spirit and beseech her for strength with which to live. Woman is a hid-

den fire from which all abilities arise like incense. She is sunlight and laughter and slow winds across wide water, she is starlight and silence and a prayer too vast for words, she is night time and sorrow and long torture through the darkness, she is high noon and high tide and peace upon the world, April woven with October, snow and flame forevermore.

The exhaustless fountain of fresh life is woman, the channel and conductor of immeasurable energies, of new intuitions that ignore man's countless failures, calmly possess the complex total of man's progress and look with insatiable eyes toward tomorrow.

What could be more triumphant and assured than the ease and indifference of children in a play-room? Dolls, a cat with kittens, scraps of scribbled paper, broken horseshoes, a sleeping dog, a girl sewing with a miniature machine, a boy sprawled out amid the litter on the floor, painting butterflies. The slaughter of ten thousand men in battle is as nothing to the next stitch, the next stroke. Where else will you see a sounder egoism, a saner valuing of the individual? Is it not a heavy penalty that men pay in exchange for the attainment of a little knowledge, the growth of a very little power of taking thought? For all our grown-up rumble of pre-

tentious words, we lean right willingly on those few who can direct because, like children, they are direct.

What is that radium called genius but this same concentration and aloofness of the child, intensified by a persistent purpose?

Childhood, and then the leaping heart of youth, that reaches to the moon—and stumbles.

The moon is a silver prophetess, presenting promises and warnings. In the woodland it is black night, it is gray night in the open, a faint powder of light lies upon the quiet field. Points of silver gleam through the motionless dark forest, points of silver moving high through the dark

and silent trees, moving higher. A full moon rolls up beyond the black wall of woodland, to fill the waiting world with a radiance magnetic and transforming. Rune of the moon: "The night air can do no more than whisper with pentrant intimacy, while I am the potent moon. What of the stars? Theirs it may be to lift the spirit into a certain communion, but what star has stirred your soul as I, the mistress of mysteries? You think now of the trees, that make you one of them, wholly a brother, and then when you cease for a moment to hold them in tense regard, subtly seek to drench you in an exhalation of madness. But what woodland can bring you the

high presence of terrific danger, the allurements of eternal loss and supreme exaltation which I distill? Only in me shall your spirit ease its implacable desire, I am the home of all hazards, all harmonies root in me."

Hazards and harmonies there are that hint of hidden laws, yet there is but one law, though it never seems the same law. Thoughts and acts have meaning only in answer to an instinct of far necessities, there is nothing right or wrong of itself. It may be more evil for one man to kill a dog than for another to kill his brother. Existence is too complex, too vast and irresistible, for men to isolate details and assign

praise or blame. Nor is there any justification for judging one man against another. What though in one there throbs a power to work his will with the world, while another holds the world of less account than the touch of a woman's lips? To each there is an authentic main urge which he alone is competent to pass upon, so that it is well for one to live as lives a lily of the marshes, while his brother shall grow rugged and strong-rooted as an oak. To each this day, to do with as he may. A man himself, a woman herself, that is the only law. There is an all-embracing law through which day and night, sorrow and laughter, ease and effort,

the lift of an eyelid and the fall of a forest tree, fit aptly together as parts of an unending progress, but the human mind obscures this law in attempting to define it. The mind of man is a sharp-eyed servant, a short-sighted master. Only the human instinct understands, nearest to truth is the inner law which each knows for himself and herself.

Stillness follows, stillness which is not quite silence. Beneath the ceaseless hammer strokes of circumstance, throughout the interweaving of thought and emotion, under all the intricacy of appraisal and endeavor, there remains a foundation of serenity, an imperturbable basis, which disaster can-

not long disturb, which achievement dances over but does not often penetrate. Men are gay or bored, are exalted or depressed, are enraptured or enraged, but not without knowledge that all this is only a tossing of waves on the surface of a fathomless pool. It is a stillness unchanging and unchangeable. But not a passive stillness. A stillness as living as the flash of sunlight and the falling of rain, a stillness as vivid as the singing of birds and the murmuring of lovers, a measure of that primal essence underlying and informing all existence.

But never a credulous stillness: gravely approving ambitions, oft-

en promoting desires, yet well aware that what men seek shall vanish like the snowflakes which children leap to catch, and grip indeed, but cannot keep.

And so an ironic stillness, which means, too, a stillness charged with a guarded pity, knowing that to each life is allotted much bitterness of blind despair. For the sum total of things seen and unseen, of things felt and things sensed, is governed throughout by an intelligence so profound, so ancient and experienced, that men, though issuing from this intelligence, can but dimly perceive its direction and are unable to interpret its intent.

The dreams and days of men drift through a forest forever strange, sunlit glens and dim lanes, far off music sounding —the ceaseless murmur of the wings of Destiny.

Yet under every surface, whether rapturous or ruthless, cynic, gay or tender, always an expectant stillness: not admitting any doubt, not for long confusing the transient flicker of lives with the indestructible permanence of life, seeing behind the mortality of men the everlasting mystery of generation, knowing that though temples fall and cathedrals crumble, though nations wither and races fade, the eternal spirit, exhaustless as the air, intense as the

sun, continues to discover, to progress and achieve, wise through the labor and effort of ages, strong with the conquering strength of certainty.

By CLARENCE STONE

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